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ABSTRACT

This study explored the assumption of age-related differences among two groups of Irish women regarding their reported assessment of the value of family and marriage related tasks experienced in young adulthood. Six of Havighurst's tasks for young adulthood relate to marriage and family. These are: (1) selecting a mate; (2) learning to live with a marriage partner; (3) starting a family; (4) rearing children; (5) managing a home; and (6) maintaining a career. It was hypothesized that younger Irish women (34 years and younger) would consider all these developmental tasks to be significantly less important than older Irish women (35 years and older). Findings from 113 subjects in the Dublin, Ireland area revealed that younger Irish women facing decisions about marriage, family, and home did not differ significantly in the importance they give most of these tasks, as compared to the older Irish women. Younger women did report a significantly lower value for one of the tasks: rearing children. For the task "Choosing the Right Partner" there was an interactive effect between family income and age group. For women whose family income was low, younger women valued this task significantly less than older women in the same income bracket. (LLL)

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ATTITUDES OF IRISH WOMEN TOWARDS FAMILY-RELATED TASKS

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Running head: Attitudes of Irish Women

ABSTRACT

A demographically diverse sample of Irish women were asked to evaluate the importance of six family-related developmental tasks, as defined by Robert Havighurst. Results from this study show that younger Irish women facing decisions about marriage, family, and home do not differ significantly in the importance they give most of these tasks, as compared to the older Irish women. These results are in contrast to a previous U.S. study by Merriam & Hyer, which indicated that younger American women valued these tasks significantly lower than did older women of the same culture. In this study, younger women did report a significantly lower value for one of the tasks: "rearing children". For the task "choosing the right partner" there was an interactive effect between family income and age group. For women whose family income was low, younger women valued this task as of significantly less importance than did older women in the same income bracket.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A great deal has been written on the nature of expectations and roles in American couple relationships. Blumstein & Schwartz (1983) surveyed thousands of American couples regarding details of their relationships, dividing the results into factors primarily dealing with money, work, and sex. Their huge sample included both heterosexual and homosexual couples. Havighurst (1952), studying primarily heterosexual relationships, divided up aspects of American couple relationships, such that, different adult developmental stages prescribe different tasks, much like Erikson's concept of crises during stages of development. Havighurst's adult tasks involve marriage and family related issues such as: selecting a mate, learning to live with a marriage partner, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, and maintaining a career. These tasks originate in three sources: (1) physical maturation, such as reaching puberty or child-bearing age, (2) cultural and/or societal expectations, such as leaving home after high school, and (3) personal values, such as having a family and a career. Most adult tasks combine (2) and (3). Havighurst assumes that all developmental tasks remain constant across generations. In other words, one will value raising children, etc., as equally important as one's parents did.

In contrast, a study by Merriam & Hyer (1984) found that women from younger generations rated certain family and marriage related developmental tasks, such as starting a family, as of significantly less importance than did older women. They discuss their findings as an example of Lewin's (1947) concept of the "unfreezing" of attitudes, behaviors, and societal norms in the American culture in regards to family-related developmental tasks.

Merriam & Hyer's discussion of the history of marriage patterns in the U.S. is an excellent description of the societal forces upon family life in the American culture. In short, they claim that it has been quite difficult to describe "typical" married life due to the series of societal upheavals in this culture. Increased sophistication of record keeping in post-World War II America most likely contributed to use of the 1950's trends as representative of typical America. Yet, as Merriam and Hyer point out,

> During the 1950's [women] married younger than any other cohort (20.0 years), had the smallest proportion of never-married women (4.1%), one of the lowest childless rates (10.1%; 1900-1940 cohorts averaged over 20% childless), and the highest average number of children per woman (3.1). (p.826)

Merriam & Hyer go on to suggest that, since we have pointed to the 1940's-1950's as the "modern" period by which we define what marriages are, we have missed the boat in regards to

noticing the "unfreezing" of trends in this country in regards to the nature of marriage. In fact, as Van Dusen & Sheldon (1976) pointed out, as early as a decade and a half ago, it was becoming apparent that "a change is taking place in a major assumption concerning women's life cycles." This change appears to be permanent, and not a generational aberration, as values of the 1960's have been considered. Thus, there has been an increase in the choices available to women in various developmental stages. According to Merriam & Hyer:

> As a result of higher divorce rates and single-parent families, increased labor force participation of mothers (especially those with young children), and the decline in the number of children per family, women's lives can no longer be described by the family life cycle alone. The distinction between life choices of childfree women and women with children are disappearing. As in men's lives, the family life cycle can be expected to become only one of a number of subcurrents in the lives of American women. (p.827)

Merriam & Hyer trace those variables which have been linked most closely with these changes in attitudes towards women's roles. First of all, Mason, Czajka, & Arber (1976) found that change towards egalitarian roles could be found for women across all "status" levels. But, they also found that education and employment best predicted women's attitudes. Thus, well educated

women, and women currently in the work force tended to have less traditional values. Mason, et al., found that age was not a good predictor of women's marriage style values.

In Australia, Craddock (1983) focused upon marriage style (traditional or equalitarian) in determining roles and tasks. Craddock distinguishes between traditional and equalitarian marriage styles by the degree of assumption of male authority in the couple's values. Thus, Craddock's concept of equalitarian marriage style suggests there has been an "unfreezing" of the traditional marriage style in that country. Furthermore, Albrecht, Bahr, & Chadwick (1979) and Roper & Labeff (1977) found that American women tended to value egalitarian relationships more than did men. Thus, it appears that women have been more likely to "unfreeze" their attitudes regarding marital styles, despite differing cultures.

Two recent studies in Ireland support Craddock's findings. Fine-Davis (1983) describes Irish family life as under pressures perhaps similar to those experienced in the U.S.:

> Many of the important changes that have affected the family as a unit have had a particularly dramatic effect on women. Major changes directly affecting women include: increased life expectancy, birth control, the reduction in infant mortality, smaller families, the involvement of more women in paid work outside the home, and the movement toward gender equality.

This link across age levels of gender equality, higher educational level, and work outside of the home was also found by Moore (1979). This is related to the "unfreezing" concept addressed by the previous researchers.

Therefore, we are beginning to understand that there is a shift in American's values for those family-related developmental tasks which are typical for young adulthood. Though the evidence points in that direction, we cannot be certain that these values are shared in other cultures. Europeans may or may not have experienced our "unfreezing" of values for family-related developmental tasks. Indeed, Havighurst's assumption that the value for developmental tasks remains consistent across generations may, in fact, be true for other cultures.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to explore the assumption of age-related differences among two groups of Irish women in regards to their reported assessment of the value of family and marriage related tasks experienced in young adulthood. Six of Havighurst's tasks for young adulthood relate to marriage and family. These are: (1) selecting a mate, (2) learning to live with a marriage partner, (3) starting a family, (4) rearing children, (5) managing a home, and (6) maintaining a career. It was hypothesized that, if we assume Irish cultural values to

mirror relaxed American female role expectations, younger Irish women would consider all these developmental tasks to be significantly less important that older Irish women.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

How important are the following to you?

		Very Important		Average		Unimportant
A.	choosing the right partner	5	4	3	2	1
B.	learning to live with a marriage partner	5	4	3	2	1
C.	starting a family	5	4	3	2	1
D.	rearing children	5	4	3	2	1
E.	managing a home	5	4	3	2	1
F.	maintaining a career	5	4	3	2	1

DATA ANALYSIS

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each task and for each category of family income (lower, middle, and upper) and age (younger and older). Two way analysis of variance with .05 level of significance was performed using these categories as independent variables. Dependent variables consisted of responses to questions regarding family-related developmental tasks. Any interactions of the independent variables was

examined. A priori multiple comparisons were made using the Dunn Bonferroni test at the .05 level of significance.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects for this study were 113 female citizens of the Republic of Ireland. Women were assigned to 2 different age categories: 34 years and younger, and 35 years or older. (Merriam and Hyer had 3 age groups: younger, middle aged, and older.) In addition, women were assigned to income level groups: low income, middle income, and upper income. This sample of Irish women was part of a larger study involving 225 Irish adults. Almost all of the sample represented couples surveyed as to marriage style and marriage satisfaction. Surveys were distributed by a Dublin marriage and family therapy organization.

The survey instrument consists of demographic data collection, the following Likert-type survey questions dealing with Havighurst's family-related developmental tasks, and additional questions and Likert-type subscales assessing marital expectations and satisfaction. The entire instrument comprises 7 pages.

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Figure 1 about here

DISCUSSION

In regards to their reported value for choosing the right marriage partner, there is a significant interactive effect $p<.001$, for age group X income. For middle and upper income women, there was no significant difference between the age groups for the value: choosing the right partner. However, for the lower income level, younger women (age 34 or younger) valued choosing the right partner as of significantly less importance than did older women (35 years or older) in the same income level. A multiple comparison of the main effect of family income group (regardless of age group) upon the mean value for "choosing

the right partner" indicates that women in the yearly middle income classification (10,000-30,000 Irish pounds) tended to value "choosing the right partner" as significantly more important ($p<.05$) than did women in the lower income group (under 10,000 pounds). The mean value for upper income women (30,000 pounds or more) was not significantly different from the other two groups: this value fell between the mean values of the lower and middle family income women.

In addition, younger women had a significantly lower reported mean value ($p<.05$) for the item "rearing children" as compared with the mean for older women. Thus, younger women, regardless of income, tend to value child raising as less important, when compared to older women's value for this task.

Our survey yielded information which allowed us to consider other categories as independent variables. In addition to considering the mean values of family income, mean values for the family-related developmental tasks were considered in regards to the women's earned income. Also, mean values for the family-related developmental tasks were considered in regards to self reports of traditional or equalitatian marriage styles as defined by Craddock (1983).

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Table 5 about here

Insert Table 6 about here

Of note is the lack of significance of personal income or self reported marriage style upon family-related developmental tasks. In other words, for almost all of these tasks, women in differing income brackets and women whose reported marriage style is traditional or equalitarian tend to value these tasks similarly.

One task, "maintaining a career", was significant ($p<.05$) in regards to personal income. Multiple comparisons indicate that women with middle personal income had a mean value for "maintaining a career" which was significantly higher ($p<.05$) than that for those women who reported low personal income. And, women with low personal income had a mean value for this task which was significantly higher ($p<.05$) than that for women who have no personal income. As income level rises, the women tended to value maintaining their careers as more important. (No women in this study reported personal income in the upper bracket.) In other words, the more money these women made, the more they valued maintaining a career outside the home.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Thus, as assessed by an adaptation of Merriam & Hyer's scale, the mean scores for Irish women on items dealing with Havighurst's family-related developmental tasks compared by age, family income, personal income, and marriage style, suggest that younger Irish women do not differ significantly from older Irish women in regards to their reported value for family-related developmental tasks such as: choosing the right partner, learning to live with a marriage partner, starting a family, or managing a home. Younger women did, however, report a value for "rearing children" which is significantly lower than that for older women. This is contrasted with Merriam & Hyer's results, which show younger American women valuing all the family-related tasks significantly lower than older women. ("Maintaining a career" was not included in Merriam & Hyer's scale.)

The findings for the Irish study support Havighurst's theory regarding the durability of values for some family-related tasks; but, younger and older women in Ireland appear to be more similar in their family-related values than do their counterparts in the U.S.

The results for the reported value for maintaining a career are entirely consistent with what we would expect from a normal population; but, the lack of significant effect of both earned

(personal) income and self reported marriage style further reinforces the assertion that, in regards to income bracket and varying marriage styles in Ireland, attitudes towards other family-related developmental tasks have not relaxed.

These findings suggest that further research is needed in the areas of the effect of culture upon values for family-related developmental tasks. The contrast between the current study's results and that of American research may be due, in part, to the effects of the homogeneous Irish culture upon its population's values for family-related tasks. in addition, the social stressors experienced in Ireland; i.e., a depressed national economy, vary from those present in the U.S. If so, these variables need to be considered in the design of future research studies.

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TABLE 1

Results of the Two Way Analysis of Variance:
Variables Age Group and Family Income for
Family-related Developmental Tasks

	p	df	f
A. choosing the right partner			
age group	1	2.22	.104
family income	2	6.62	.002a
age group X family income	2	8.18	.0005b
B. learning to live with a marriage partner			
age group	1	.22	.64
family income	2	.21	.81
age group X family income	2	.07	.93
C. starting a family			
age group	1	.01	.92
family income	2	.58	.56
age group X family income	2	.48	.62
D. rearing children			
age group	1	3.80	.054c
family income	2	.5	.61
age group X family income	2	2.06	.13

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

F. maintaining a career			
age group	1	.38	.54
family income	2	.97	.38
age group X family income	2	.42	.66

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a. p<.05 95F1,103 p<.01 99F1,103

b. p<.05 95F1,103 p<.001 999F2,103

c. p<=.05 95F1,103

TABLE 2

Mean Responses by Women in Two Age Groups
for Family-related Developmental Tasks

Task	Row Means	Younger* 34 years or less	Older* 35 years or more
A. choosing the right partner	4.90	4.95	4.92
B. learning to live with a marriage partner	4.97	4.88	4.92
C. starting a family	4.17	3.95	4.06
D. rearing children	4.63	4.74	4.68
E. managing a home	4.13	3.89	4.01
F. maintaining a career**	2.70	2.69	2.695
column means	4.25	4.18	

(*2 age groupings used for convenience in analyzing the data)

(** task found in Havighurst, not included in Merriam & Hyer)

TABLE 3

Mean Responses by Women in Three Family Income Groups for Family-related Developmental Tasks

Task	Row Means	Lower*** Yearly Income	Middle*** Yearly Income	Upper*** Yearly Income
A. choosing the right partner	4.70	4.87	4.87	4.85
B. learning to live with a marriage partner	5.00	4.89	4.87	4.92
C. starting a family	3.78	4.09	3.67	3.85
D. rearing children	4.70	4.71	4.75	4.72
E. managing a home	3.90	3.84	4.37	4.04
F. maintaining a career	2.00	2.72	2.81	2.51
column means		4.01	4.20	4.22

(*** lower yearly income = 10,000 Irish pounds; middle yearly income = 10,000-30,000 pounds; upper yearly income = over 30,000 pounds)

TABLE 4

Results of the Two Way Analysis of Variance:
Variables Personal Income Group and Marriage Style:
Equalitarian or Traditional (EGT), for
Family-Related Developmental Tasks

	p	df	f
A. choosing the right partner			
personal income	2	.30	.74
EGT	1	.21	.65
personal income X EGT	1	.007	.79
B. learning to live with a marriage partner			
personal income	2	.38	.69
EGT	1	.04	.84
personal income X EGT	1	.72	.40
C. starting a family			
personal income	2	.19	.83
EGT	1	.18	.67
personal income X EGT	1	.66	.42
D. rearing children			
personal income	2	.09	.91
EGT	1	.26	.61
personal income X EGT	1	.09	.76

TABLE 4 CONTINUED

E. managing a home			
personal income	2	1.41	.25
EGT	1	2.47	.12
personal income X EGT	1	.62	.43
F. maintaining a career			
personal income	2	15.58	.0001e
EGT	1	.16	.69
personal income X EGT	1	.00	.98

e. p<.05 95F1,102 p<=.0001 9999F1,102

TABLE 5

Mean Responses by Women in Three Personal Income Groups for Family-related Developmental Tasks

Row	Task	No Income	Lower Yearly Income	Middle Yearly Income	Row Means
A.	choosing the right partner	4.94	4.97	4.89	4.93
B.	learning to live with a marriage partner	4.86	4.97	4.90	4.91
C.	starting a family	3.98	4.07	3.96	4.00
D.	rearing children	4.73	4.70	4.65	4.69
E.	managing a home	4.00	4.03	3.76	3.93
F.	maintaining a career	2.03	2.77	3.79	2.68
	column means	4.09	4.25	4.32	

TABLE 6

Mean Responses by Women According to Self-Reported Marriage Style for Family-Related Developmental Tasks

Task	Row Means	Equalitatian	Traditional
A. choosing the right partner	4.92	4.97	4.945
B. learning to live with a marriage partner	4.90	4.90	4.90
C. starting a family	4.01	3.86	3.93
D. rearing children	4.66	4.77	4.71
E. managing a home	3.97	3.77	3.87
F. maintaining a career	2.83	2.13	2.48
column means		4.21	4.07

FIGURE 1

Interaction Effects for Family Income Group and Age Group Upon Item 1: Choosing the Right Partner